

# The Day of the Lord



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *2 Pet. 3:1, 2; John 21:15–17; 2 Pet. 3:3–13; Ps. 90:4; Matt. 24:43–51; 2 Pet. 3:14–18.*

**Memory Text:** “Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness?” (*2 Peter 3:11, NRSV*).

In ages past, people who didn't believe in God were seen as untrustworthy, even potentially dangerous. Why? The idea was simple: if they didn't believe in God, then they didn't believe in any future judgment in which they would have to answer before Him for their deeds. Without this incentive, people would have a greater tendency to do wrong.

Though such thinking is rather antiquated (and “politically incorrect”) today, one cannot deny the logic and reason behind it. Of course, many people don't need the fear of a future judgment in order to do right. But at the same time, the prospect of answering to God could certainly help motivate correct behavior.

As we have seen, Peter was not afraid to warn about the judgment that evildoers would face before God, because the Bible is clear that such a judgment will come. In this context, Peter speaks unambiguously about the end of days, judgment, the second coming of Jesus, and the time that the “elements shall melt with fervent heat” (*2 Pet. 3:10*). Peter knew that we are all sinners, and thus, with such prospects before us, he asks: “What manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?” (*2 Pet. 3:11, NKJV*).

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 17.

## The Line of Authority

Peter warned his readers about the kind of dangerous teachings the church would face. He cautioned against those who, while promising liberty, would lead people back into the bondage of sin, the opposite of the freedom that we have been promised in Christ.

Unfortunately, this wasn't the only false teaching that would confront the church. Another dangerous one would come. However, before Peter gets to this specific warning, he says something else first.

**“This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour”** (2 Pet. 3:1, 2).

**What** point is Peter making here about why his readers should listen to what he is writing? *See also John 21:15–17.*

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In 2 Peter 3:1, 2, Peter reminds them of the inspired words that had come before in the “holy prophets.” Thus, he was again pointing them back to the Bible, to the Old Testament. He was reminding them that they had the “sure word of prophecy” (2 Pet. 1:19). He wanted to be clear that their beliefs were grounded in the Word of God. Nothing in the New Testament justifies the idea that the Old Testament was no longer valid or of little importance. On the contrary, it is the testimony of the Old Testament that helps establish the validity of the New and the claims that Peter was making about Jesus.

But there's more. Peter then asserts a clear line from the “holy prophets” of the Old Testament to his own authority as one of the “apostles of the Lord and Saviour.” He was clear about the calling that he received from the Lord to do what he was doing. No wonder he spoke with such conviction and certainty. He knew the source of his message.

**Why must the Word of God, and not culture or our own judgment or reason, be the ultimate authority in our lives? (After all, why else would we keep the seventh-day Sabbath other than because of the Word of God?)**

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## The Scoffers

After seeking to make his readers “mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour” (2 Pet. 3:2), Peter gets into his specific warning. Perhaps, knowing how dangerous this teaching would be, he sought to impress upon it the authority with which he was writing.

**Read 2 Peter 3:3, 4. What arguments will skeptics of Christ’s return advance?**

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There’s an important similarity between those who promoted false liberty and those who were expressing skepticism about the Second Coming. The first group walked “according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness” (2 Pet. 2:10, *NKJV*); meanwhile, those who were denying the return of Christ were those who were “walking according to their own lusts” (2 Pet. 3:3, *NKJV*).

(It’s not just a coincidence that sinful passions can lead to false teachings, is it?)

The scoffers, Peter warned, will ask the pointed question, “Where is the promise of his coming?” (2 Pet. 3:4). In doing so, they will challenge the long-standing belief of Christians that Jesus will return to this earth, and soon. After all, especially because he is talking about the last days, these scoffers will bring up the undeniable reality that many Christians have died, and things do indeed continue to go on as they always have.

On the surface, it’s not an unreasonable question. Even holy Enoch, Ellen G. White wrote, saw that the righteous and the wicked “would go to the dust together, and that this would be their end” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 85), and he was troubled by it. If even Enoch, who lived before the Flood, struggled with this question, how much more so those living during the thousands of years afterward, and even down to the “last days”?

And what about us today, as Seventh-day *Adventists*? Our very name promotes the idea of Christ’s second advent. And yet, He still has not come. And yes, we do face the scoffers, just as Peter had predicted we would.

**In your own faith experience, how do you deal with the fact that Christ has not returned yet? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.**

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## A Thousand Years as a Day

**In 2** Peter 3:8–10, how does Peter respond to the argument that the scoffers will bring? What does he say that even now can help us to understand why Christ has not yet returned?

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Peter responds to the issue of the unchanging nature of the world. He reminds his listeners that it is not true that the world has continued unchanged since Creation. (Notice how Peter goes right back to the Word of God as his source and authority.) There was a time of great wickedness, after which God destroyed the world with a flood (2 Pet. 3:6). And indeed, the Flood brought about a great change to the world, one that remains with us today. Peter then says that the next destruction will be by fire, not water (2 Pet. 3:10).

Peter also wrote, “One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8). In saying this, Peter may have been reflecting on the words of Psalm 90:4: “For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.” In other words, our conception of time is not like God’s; so, we need to be careful in the judgments we make about time.

From a human perspective, there does seem to be a delay in the return of Christ. But we are looking at things only from our human perspective. From God’s perspective, there is no delay. In fact, Peter is saying that extra time has been granted because God is showing His patience. He does not wish that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). The extra time, then, has been allowed to provide opportunity for many to repent.

Yet, warns Peter, God’s patience should not be taken as an opportunity to postpone a decision about Jesus. The day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief in the night. A thief who comes at night probably expects to sneak away unnoticed. But while the day of the Lord will come like a thief, it will certainly be noticed. As Peter says, “the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat” (2 Pet. 3:10). Thus, Peter’s message is like Paul’s: “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2).

## So What?

A young man tried to witness to his mother. He told her about the death of Jesus and the promise of His return. He was fairly proud of himself, thinking that he had done quite an eloquent job. When he finished his mini-sermon about Jesus and the Second Coming, his mother looked at him and said: “So what does that have to do with me now?”

**Read 2** Peter 3:11–13. How does Peter answer the question, “So, what does that have to do with me now?” See Matt. 24:43–51.

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As we have said, our very name Seventh-day Adventist reveals our belief in the reality of Christ’s return. The teaching is foundational; our whole Christian faith would become meaningless without the return of Christ and all that it promises.

But are we not in danger of becoming like the wicked servant in the parable of Matthew 24:43–51? We might not be doing the specific kind of evil depicted in the parable, but that’s not the point (it is, after all, a parable). Instead, what the parable warns about is that it could become easier to lower our standards, especially regarding how we treat others, and to become more like the world and less fervent in our belief in the Lord’s return.

Sure, now and then we do face those who, with their charts and prophetic calculations, claim to have the date for Christ’s return. But for the most part the danger facing Seventh-day Adventists is not that they are setting dates for Christ’s soon return. Rather, the danger is that as the years pass, the promise of the Second Coming starts to play a much smaller role in our thinking.

Yes, the longer we are here, the closer we get to the Second Coming. On the other hand, the longer we are here, the easier it is for us to imagine His return as so far away that it really doesn’t impact our daily lives. Scripture warns against this kind of complacency. As Peter said, if Jesus is to return, and we are to face judgment, Christians should live lives of holiness and godliness (2 Pet. 3:11). The reality of the Second Coming, whenever it happens, should impact how we live now.

**How much does the reality of the Second Coming affect you in your daily life and thinking? What, if anything, does your answer say to you about your life and faith?**

## A Final Appeal

Peter ends his epistle with a theme that has pervaded it from the start: living holy lives and being careful not to be led astray by “the error of the wicked” (2 Pet. 3:17).

**Read** 2 Peter 3:14–18. To whom is Peter appealing, and what is he warning about in this appeal?

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How interesting that Peter ends his epistle with an appeal to the writings of “our beloved brother Paul” (2 Pet. 3:15). Paul also wrote of the need to live at peace while waiting for the second coming of Jesus and to use the time to develop holy lives (see Rom. 2:4, Rom. 12:18, Phil. 2:12).

Also notice the way that Peter’s reference to the writings of Paul shows that Paul’s writings were highly valued early in Christian history. Whether or not Peter is referring to the whole collection of Paul’s writings now found in the New Testament or only a subset of them cannot be determined. Nevertheless, Peter’s comments show that Paul’s letters were highly regarded.

Finally, Peter comments that Paul’s writings can be misconstrued, just like other Scriptures. The Greek word *grapha* literally means “writings,” but in this context it clearly means “sacred writings,” such as the books of Moses and the prophets. Here is very early evidence that Paul’s writings had taken on authority, like the authority of the Hebrew Bible.

And considering what we read earlier about false teachers who promise liberty, it’s not hard to imagine people using Paul’s writings about liberty and grace as an excuse for sinful behavior. Paul strongly emphasized righteousness by faith alone (Rom. 3:21, 22), but nothing in his writings gives people a license for sin (see Rom. 6:1–14). Paul himself had to deal with this error in regard to what he had been preaching and teaching about righteousness by faith. Yet, Peter warns, those who twist his writings do so at the risk of “their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:16).

**What are choices you can make right now that can help you to live the kind of life that we have been called to live in Christ Jesus?**

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**Further Thought:** From our perspective, it can seem as if the Second Coming is greatly delayed. Jesus obviously knew that we would feel this way, and in some parables He warned against what could happen if we weren't careful and watchful during this time. Take the parable of the two servants in Matthew 24:45–51 (mentioned in Wednesday's study). They both expected their master to return. But they reached two different conclusions about his return. One decided he must be ready for the master to return at any time. The other said that the master was delayed, and therefore he took it as an opportunity to act in an evil manner. "Because we know not the exact time of His coming, we are commanded to watch. 'Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching.' Luke 12:37. Those who watch for the Lord's coming are not waiting in idle expectancy. The expectation of Christ's coming is to make men fear the Lord, and fear His judgments upon transgression. It is to awaken them to the great sin of rejecting His offers of mercy. Those who are watching for the Lord are purifying their souls by obedience to the truth."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 634.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1** In class, discuss your answer to Monday's question about the Second Coming. What are some ways in which we deal with the fact that Christ has not yet returned? What can we learn from one another's answers?
- 2** What teachings, practices, and beliefs do we hold as Seventh-day Adventists that do not come from culture or reason or tradition but are solely from the Word of God?
- 3** As we saw during the week, Peter linked sinful tendencies and passions with false teaching. The lesson had this statement: "It's not just a coincidence that sinful passions can lead to false teachings, is it?" Why is it not just a coincidence? What could be the various links between the two?
- 4** Albert Einstein presented to the world the amazing idea that time is not absolute. That is, depending on where you are and how fast you are moving, time in your frame of reference will be different from someone else's in another frame of reference. The point is, time is something very mysterious, and it acts in ways that we don't fully understand. How might this idea help us to realize that time for God is not the same as it is for us, especially in the context of Christ's having not yet returned?

## Mother of Many: Part 2

Every week, we talked about God and read from the Bible. We prayed together, and then we ate. At first, I think they listened just to be polite and get a hot meal. But as time went by, they became more interested in what I was trying to teach them.

Soon the boys were treating me like a mother, confiding in me and trusting me. Some of them told me about their desire to get rid of their drug habits or about things they had stolen. I listened and counseled them about how to live a happy, honest life instead. I told them about the joys of hard work and honest labor. I told them about people in the Bible and how they resisted temptation and followed God's plan, often changing the world around them. The boys listened and were inspired to trust God to change them. I encouraged the ones who had parents to return home to their families. It took a lot of talking, but eventually some decided to go home.

One boy, Pierre, had run away from home when he was only seven years old. He had lost some money he was supposed to take to his mother, and he was afraid of being punished. So, he ran away. Eventually he arrived in the capital city, where he lived on the streets for the next eight years. After I told him the story of the prodigal son, Pierre agreed to return home. But he was afraid to go by himself. So, I agreed to go with him.

We went to the bus station together and bought tickets to his hometown. When we arrived, we walked down almost forgotten streets until he found his house. His mother stared at the tall young man standing in front of her, unable to tell that this was the little boy she had lost so long ago. She thought her son was dead. She stared at Pierre for a long minute. When her mind at last grasped whom she was seeing, she threw her arms around him and hugged him tightly, weeping for joy. Then she began calling her neighbors to see her son, who had been lost but had come home. That night there was joy in one home over a lost child who had returned.

I stayed in Pierre's town overnight so I could take him to visit the local pastor. I explained that Pierre had recently accepted Jesus as his Savior and returned to his mother's house. He would need lots of nurturing.

*To be continued in next week's Inside Story.*

## The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Texts:** *2 Peter 3:1–7, 11–13*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand that the coming judgment is just as certain as God’s actions in the past.

**Feel:** Be grateful that God is patient and not willing that any should perish, and be confident that He is striving to save everyone He can.

**Do:** Live a holy and godly life, blameless and at peace with God, looking forward to and hastening Christ’s return.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: The Certainty of Judgment**

**A** On what basis do scoffers want to deny the impending return of Christ?

**B** To what evidence does Peter point his readers for the certainty of coming judgment?

**II. Feel: Confidence in the Face of Judgment**

**A** Why is time viewed differently by God than by us? Why are we often so impatient when God is so patient? Do we care for souls as much as He does?

**B** What ground for confidence does Peter cite in the face of impending judgment?

**III. Do: Preparation for Judgment**

**A** Peter appeals for what attitude and actions in view of the coming destruction?

**B** Why does Peter encourage us to hasten Christ’s return in view of the fact that God is patiently waiting for all to come to repentance?

► **Summary:** Peter contrasts the attitudes of those who eagerly look forward to the judgment, the eradication of sin, and the new creation with the attitudes of scoffers who want to deny the original Creation, the judgment at the Flood, and the coming final judgment and new creation. He appeals to his readers to act appropriately in view of that which is certain to occur.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *2 Peter 3:1, 10–14*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Peter has written both of his letters in order to stimulate his readers to “wholesome thinking” (*2 Pet. 3:1, NIV*). This thinking has to do with preparing for judgment at the coming “day of God,” when the atmospheric heavens will be destroyed by fire and the elements of the earth will melt with intense heat (*2 Pet. 3:12*). Scoffers willfully deny that such judgment is coming. They argue that God has not intervened in the past, so we should not expect His intervention in the future. Believers in Scripture know that God intervened at Creation and at the worldwide Flood and that He will do so again, but with fire (*2 Pet. 3:3–7*). This knowledge is motivation for living holy and godly lives in preparation for such severe judgment (*2 Pet. 3:11, 14*).

**Just for Teachers:** Romans 1:18–21 points out that, based on abundant evidence in the natural world, there is no excuse for ignorance about the power and deity of God. Yet, Peter points to scoffers in the last days who deny God’s intervention in history, whether in the past or in the future.

The scoffers of the last days teach uniformitarianism. This view posits that history is an unbroken cycle of material causes and effects, which account for all data without any supernatural intervention. Asserting that history is a closed continuum, they insist that there is a fundamental homogeneity between all events such that an analogy can be made between any two or more points, and the present provides the clues to explain the past and the future. “ ‘All things continue as they have been since the beginning of creation,’ ” scoffers assert (*2 Pet. 3:4, HCSB*).

By ruling out the supernatural *a priori*, skeptics of the Bible are able to control the variables and, assuming uniformity in rates of change, extrapolate backward to postulate long ages of time during which microevolution eventually results in macroevolution. Thus, they can deny a relatively recent literal six-day Creation, as claimed in Scripture, as well as Noah’s worldwide flood, which produced the world more or less as we know it today.

Denying God’s activity in past history, including Creation and judgment, they feel confident about denying God’s activity in the future, including final judgment and a new creation. Peter says that these claims are willful ignorance in the face of historical reality.

**Opening Activity and Discussion:** Ask the class to read together 2 Peter 3:1–4 and Jude 17–19. Discuss the issue of skepticism about biblical claims regarding God’s activity in history. To what does Peter refer when he speaks of “the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets” (2 Pet. 3:2, *NIV*)? What is “the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles” (2 Pet. 3:2, *NIV*) to which he refers? In what ways may we be guilty of being skeptical about biblical claims?

## ►STEP 2—Explore

### Bible Commentary

#### I. Judgment Delayed Is Not Judgment Deflected (*Review together 2 Peter 3:8–13.*)

Despite an apparent delay in the anticipated day of judgment, which leads many to scoff at its prospect, Peter assures his readers that any seeming slowness of God to fulfill His promise of judgment in no way decreases the certainty of judgment. God views time not from the human perspective of a brief lifetime but from the divine perspective of eternity (*compare with Ps. 90:4*). He is patient about bringing judgment, unwilling that any should perish, wanting all to come to repentance.

Nevertheless, the day of the Lord *will* come. Like a thief in the night, it will catch many by surprise because they did not heed Jesus’ command to keep alert and to watch. It will be a cataclysmic event. Both atmospheric heavens and the elements of earth will be completely destroyed by a roaring inferno of fire, which John calls a lake or sea of fire (*Rev. 20:14*).

Peter’s appeal is vivid: “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming” (2 Pet. 3:11, 12, *NIV*). (Note that Peter here conflates all of the end-time judgment events into a single description. He does not attempt to separate the Second Coming from the final judgment but melds them together into the eschatological day of the Lord. One must not attempt to reconstruct an end-time sequence of events from this passage, because that is not Peter’s purpose. Rather, he is talking about preparation for judgment.)

**Consider This:** The Second Coming, as far as each one of us individually is concerned, is never farther away than a moment after we die.

#### II. How to Prepare for Judgment (*Review 2 Peter 3:14–18 with your class.*)

Peter concludes his letter with an appeal to prepare for the coming judgment. His readers need to “make every effort to be found spotless,

blameless and at peace with [God]” (2 Pet. 3:14, NIV). Lest they become discouraged with the passage of time, they need to bear in mind that God’s patience is meant to result in salvation for as many as possible. They also need to be on their guard against being led astray by the errors of lawless people, lest they fall from their secure position in Christ. Finally, they need to grow in the grace and knowledge of their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Each of the aforementioned statements is a recap of points that Peter has made earlier in the letter. What is new in this final section is his reference to the letters of “our dear brother Paul,” who “also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters” (2 Pet. 3:15, 16, NIV). The problem is that because Paul’s letters “contain some things that are hard to understand,” “ignorant and unstable people distort” them, “as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:16, NIV). Peter is essentially equating Paul’s epistles with the rest of Scripture, acknowledging their teaching authority for the church.

**Consider This:** Peter and Paul were contemporaries who knew each other personally and respected each other. Many scholars have sought to portray them as having different theologies and being in competition with one another, but Peter shows great respect for Paul and his writings—even equating them with Scripture. What evidence do Peter’s two epistles provide for the common theological perspectives that they share?

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What relevance do the issues of Creation and Noah’s flood have for the question of the scoffers who in essence say, “Where is this coming He promised?”
- ❷ Peter uses the destruction of this creation by conflagration as an incentive for living holy and godly lives (2 Pet. 3:11). Why do you think he resorts to this kind of motivation?

## ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Hebrews 11:6 informs us that “without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (NIV). If we do not believe that we are accountable to God and that there will be a judgment against sin and a reward for the righteous, there is no point in believing in God, for we have no one to answer to and there is no future to look forward to.

**Thought Questions:**

- ① The scoffers to whom Peter refers see history as an unbroken continuum of cause and effect with, perhaps, some very slow evolutionary changes but no cataclysmic events. Why is it critical to our spiritual well-being to avoid this type of thinking?
- ② Some look forward to the coming judgment with eager anticipation, while others fear being consumed in the lake of fire. What is my attitude toward the coming judgment, and why?

**Activity:** Have the class read together Malachi 4:1–3. Discuss the two groups and the two options presented in this text. To which group do we choose to belong? What needs to happen in order for us to be found in the latter group?

**►STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** *The issue of an apparent delay in Christ’s return is not an easy one, but Peter suggests that it is a matter of perspective. Given that God knows the day and hour of His coming (Matt. 24:36) and that He “ ‘who is coming will come and will not delay’ ” (Heb. 10:37, NIV), there is no delay from God’s perspective. As Ellen G. White says, “God’s purposes know no haste and no delay.”—The Desire of Ages, p. 32. Delay is only from the human perspective, because we do not view time as God does. There seems to have been a delay because we expected the event of His coming to happen sooner; but God’s plans have not changed. He would like to have been able to come sooner, but He could not because we have not done the preparatory work He has given us to do. This failure on our part, however, does not take God by surprise or cause Him to delay His plans. He knew what was going to happen even if He provided for it to happen sooner.*

**Activity:** Have the class create on a whiteboard or large poster board a time line of history from a biblical perspective, plotting major events using an approximate scale to represent a rough chronology. Locate where we find ourselves today on the time line of history and prophecy, and discuss with the class how Peter’s message of preparation for final judgment is relevant for today’s readers. Alternately, where whiteboard or poster board are unavailable, ask class members to list major events in biblical history in chronological order, and then lead them in the discussion of how Peter’s message of preparation for final judgment is relevant for us today.